Gagaw's Tale

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Summary: A quick story, from the other end of the Assault Rifle.
 Oneshot.

Gagaw's Tale

Gagaw ran, his stubby legs a blur, his small, flat feet pounding the
turf in a panicked rhythm. His breathing came in quick gasps as he
sprinted for safety. His kind was not suited for speed, but he
scorned eons of breeding as he fled.

He dared not turn around, but he didn't need to. He knew what was
there.

When he had first heard stories about the mysterious green human with
supernatural powers, he had not believed them. When he was stationed
on a ship heading for the destruction of Reach, the infidel humans'
base of operations, he heard the Elites speak of him also. He had
dismissed that as well, as Elites will say anything to save their
honor. Ten humans turn into thousands when an Elite is defeated and
tells his tale. Gagaw was ignorant and hopeful when he was loaded
into a drop pod to attack Reach's orbital docks.

Ignorance is bliss.

When he landed, Gagaw hoped that he could just sit behind cover and
take pot shots at the distant human space vessels while the rest of
his squad did the work. He had almost succeeded, but the gods had had
the malicious foresight to place him in front of an Elite in his pod.
As soon as they touched down, Lerk Lutamee (the son-of-a Jackal Elite
behind him) shoved him out and ran headlong onto the humans' dock.
When Gagaw got up, he was pushed forward by a squad of Jackals, who
hissed at him and prodded him with their plasma pistols. He
grudgingly moved out of the way.

He found a piece of debris stuck into the hull of the dock and sat
down behind it. An Elite walked by, and Gagaw stood, so as not to be

punished for his negligence. The Elite took up a defensive position at the door of the drop pod, so Gagaw could not sit down again.

He turned around and looked over his cover. He rested his head on his hand, and was quickly bored. Yet another mission where he was stuck doing nothing. It would be okay if he could take a nap, but with the damned Elite standing behind him, he had to look like he was doing something.

He scanned the landscape in front of him, seeing nothing. He looked up, and saw the Covenant fleet tearing apart the inferior humans. He sighed, then looked down again. He jumped, for he had seen something among the pockmarked debris on the dock.

It was green.

Gagaw squinted, hoping to catch another glimpse of what he had seen. A shadow darted between two wrecked cargo containers. It moved so fast that Gagaw almost didn't catch it, but he saw the lightning-quick flash of green again. It was heading off to the right, towards another group of Covenant troops. After a few seconds, Gagaw heard an explosion, and turned around.

The other group's drop pod had just exploded. The blast sent searing-hot refuse flying through the air. A landing claw four times Gagaw's height flew past him, barely missing him.

The Elite behind him wasn't so lucky. The landing claw slammed into him, crushing him to a bright blue mush. The claw impaled Gagaw's landing pod, almost knocking it off the dock.

Gagaw turned back around, hoping to catch sight of the enemy that had done this. He looked to the sight of the explosion, and saw a figure standing amidst the cloud of Covenant blood and the debris of the pod.

It was about two and a half times as tall as Gagaw, and held a lethal looking long-barreled weapon in its right hand. It stood upright.

It stood like a human.

As the cloud floated away, he got a better look at this strange human. It was wearing odd, metallic green armor, with patches of black where the green plates didn't cover. It searched the remains of the drop pod, quickly rifling through the remains of the Elite that had pushed Gagaw out of the pod when he had first landed. It looked over the whole area, its eerie copper-colored visor reflecting the carnage that it had inflicted.

Suddenly, it moved. Its head snapped to the left, and it started backing away from the wreckage. Gagaw followed its look, and saw why the human was frightened.

A squad of eight Elites advanced on the human's position, their plasma rifles leveled at him. They continued to march towards him, never wavering in their determination to spill human blood.

The human turned, then ran away from the Elites. The Elite leader roared with laughter, and he and his comrades broke into a run, ready for the kill. The human turned and hid behind a piece of junk

embedded in the dock's hull.

The Elites slowed, and crept forward, rifles once again at the ready. Gagaw could not see the human anymore, but he chuckled softly to himself. _Elites may be pompous scum, but they get the job done_, Gagaw thought to himself.

He watched with increasing interest as the Elites proceeded towards the human's hiding spot. They stopped at the corner of the wreckage, and paused while they flanked the hole.

Gagaw chuckled again. He had heard that human blood was especially tasty, and Grunts enjoy good blood every once in a while.

The Elite leader bellowed, and his team ran into the pitiful human's haven. Gagaw lost sight of the Elites, and waited for a scream.

He heard one.

The Elites' leader roared again, but not with laughter. He screamed in terror, as Gagaw saw a flash of pale blue light. Bits of the Elites came flying out of the wreckage, blood spraying in every direction.

Gagaw gaped, his arms fell limp to his sides as he saw the slaughter. A flash of motion caught his eye. He looked to the left, and saw the human running, crouched, towards the airlock to the interior of the dock.

Gagaw was beginning to believe the stories.

The Covenant base camp was close, but seemed to get farther as Gagaw ran. Bullets sprayed splinters from the trees around him.

That puzzled Gagaw. The green-armored ones never miss. He chanced a quick look behind him, and saw that he was correct.

A group of about five normal human soldiers ran after him, slowly gaining on him. A couple fired at Gagaw as he ran, but they couldn't aim well while running. He dodged between trees, and gained some distance on them when he ran below a particularly low branch. He wondered where his original pursuers had gone.

After the battle at Reach was ended in victory, Gagaw had been commemorated as the only one to survive from his drop group. Everyone else that had landed with him had been killed, either by the green-armored human or his ingenious traps.

Gagaw had been reassigned to a new battle group. After a couple of hours of rest, he sighed as he walked onto his drop ship. At least the drop ships had controls, and Gagaw wouldn't be shooting through space without any power to alter their course.

It wasn't much better, though. the Elite pilots of the drop ships were known for being cocky, even borderline suicidal.

At least he was fighting on the ground, though. If there was one thing Gagaw hated more than Elites (other than Jackals, of course, may their souls burn in eternal torment), it was space. He preferred the familiar feeling of his weight on a planet. The reassuring grip

of gravity.

He sighed again as he found his seat and strapped in. He unholstered his Needler, and checked the weapon carefully. He flipped off the safety, and its crystalline needles glowed a bright pink-purple. Satisfied, he turned the safety back on, put the weapon away, and thought again of how he could avoid doing any work on this mission.

His thoughts were interrupted by a group of Jackals boarding the drop ship. When they came to him, they stopped. Their leader walked up to Gagaw, and leaned in so close that he could smell the foul creature's rancid breath.

"It lookssss like thissss little Grunt hassss taken my sssseat, boyssss." the jackal said. He smiled malevolently, and bared his long, sharp teeth. "What shall we do with him? He knowssss hissss kind shouldn't messss with ussss Jackalssss."

Gagaw thought for a moment. He could draw his Needler and carve up the Jackal's face with it, or he could unstrap himself, get up, and find another seat. He didn't feel like seeing any more action than he had to, so he decided on the latter.

As he was walking away, the lead Jackal turned to him.

"Hey, Grunt!" he said, sticking his nose in the air. "It'ssss good to know that ssssome of your kind know their placccce around here." He opened his rank mouth and spit in Gagaw's face.

Gagaw saw the Elite pilot coming back into the passenger hold to inspect the cargo. In one motion, the Grunt pulled out his Needler, clicked off the safety, and shot the lead Jackal in the head.

For a second, the Jackal was stunned. He was in disbelief that the explosive needle stuck in his forehead had been fired by a Grunt.

He was only confused for a moment before the needle exploded. Shards flew around the cabin, cutting some of the other Jackals and bouncing off the pilot's shield.

The Elite whirled on Gagaw.

"YOU SON OF A HUMAN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING!" He roared. His hand moved to the plasma rifle at his hip.

Gagaw pointed to the remaining Jackals. "I was packing up when those Jackals attacked me. I didn't mean to fire, but when I was backing away I knocked my Needler on the floor. It fired, and I picked it up to stop it."

One of the Jackals turned to Gagaw. "You lie! I'll have your head for thissss!"

He leapt at Gagaw, but the pilot put his arm between them.

"Save it for the humans. We'll finish this later."

"I don't care what any of you arrogant ratsss sssay, I'm going to kill him!" He took a swipe at the Elite's face.

Before the Jackal could react, the Elite grabbed him by the throat, picked him off the ground, and slammed him into a bulkhead. He leaned into the Jackal's face.

"You'll do well to remember your place, Jackal." he whispered murderously. "I'm the pilot of this ship, and an Elite before that. I call the shots, you carry them out and hope to damnation that I don't find something wrong with how you do them. Do you understand? Or do I have to make this harder than it already is?" He drew his plasma rifle, and put it to the Jackal's head.

The Jackal remained silent. The Elite tightened his grip on the Jackal's throat, and the Jackal squealed and wrapped his long, thin fingers around the hand that was squeezing the life out of him.

"Fine! I'll leave him alone!" the Jackal choked out. The Elite dropped him to the floor.

"I hope I don't have to come back here again, for your sake."

He walked out, to leave the Jackal to cough up purple blood onto the floor. The Jackal glared at Gagaw, but did nothing. His comrades glanced at the cockpit, then slunk back to their seats and strapped in.

The choking Jackal shakily rose to his feet.

"Thissss issssn't over, Grunt." He growled, then joined his companions.

Gagaw ducked below another low branch and put on a burst of speed. His feet crunched on sticks and leaves, and he heard the heavy footfalls of the humans behind him. He zigzagged through a maze of trees and underbrush, and the bullets stopped raining round him. He looked back, and saw the humans stuck in a group of thorn bushes. He looked ahead again. His camp was much closer now. He picked up speed as he started his final sprint to safety. Two huge sentry towers guarded the entrance to Gagaw's group's camp. He heard the sounds of the humans behind him chasing him once more, but he didn't care. The base defenses would take care of them. He felt a wave of relief as the towers came into motion. His happiness dissolved when he saw what was happening.

They were bearing on him.

He stopped to look at the gunner in the turret closest to him, and what he saw froze him in terror.

It was green.

Gagaw looked to the other turret, and was met by the same copper-eyed stare. The green-armored humans had ran ahead of him, using their unbelievable speed. Before Gagaw had even gotten to his base, they had defeated the defenses and killed the rest of his group.

Gagaw dug his feet into the ground as he started to run again. After all, he had survived this kind of thing once before, and he could do it again. Or so he hoped.

After he had dealt with the Jackals and landed on Reach, Gagaw's luck seemed to be improving. As it turned out, most of the humans on the planet were already dead from the initial invasion. Gagaw's group was one of the last to land. The Elites got out first, and started setting up the base camp. The pilot got up from his seat and walked back through the passenger hold towards the exit. As he walked, he kicked the body of the dead Jackal. It flopped limply out of the hatch, and the pilot kept walking. Gagaw followed close behind him. He didn't want to be left alone with the Jackals.

Gagaw emerged from the drop ship and squinted at the bright light of the local star, Eridanus. His eyes adjusted, and he surveyed his surroundings. His ship had landed in a large clearing a good distance from a huge forest. It was about 100 of the humans' "meters" to the nearest tree.

He turned around, and saw that one of the Grunts' large methane tanks had been installed. He jogged over to it, ready for some relaxation.

Halfway there, his path was blocked by an Elite in red veteran armor. The Elite bent over Gagaw and placed his hands on his hips.

"I don't recall letting the Grunts off of their construction duty yet." he said. His mandibles formed a wicked smirk, which showed his small, sharp teeth. He pointed to a gang of Grunts swarming over a pile of metal poles and blast-resistant panels. "Get back to work, or I'll leave you to the Jackals."

It was a familiar threat to Grunts. The two races put up with each other only as a show of hostility to the humans, who could care less whether they worked together or not. It was mainly a front for the Elites, so they wouldn't be killed outright for insubordination or misconduct. That was another common event.

So, with another sigh, Gagaw marched off to join the work crew. He picked up a welder, walked behind the half-built structure, sat down, and immediately fell asleep.

He woke a couple of hours later. Eridanus was just beginning to sink below the mountains in the distance. Gagaw yawned, and lazily checked his methane gas level.

It was a serious problem for Grunts. They often fell asleep, and depleted their breathable gas tanks while asleep. Countless dozens of them died daily from this lack of alacrity.

Gagaw's gauge read twenty percent. At fifteen, Grunts were required to visit the nearest methane tank to fill up. Gagaw felt like taking a nice nap in the spacious tank. He held his breath, then slightly unscrewed his breather mask. He heard a soft hiss as the gas escaped into the air, making a foul odor.

He waited until his gauge read twelve, then secured his mask once again. Fifteen was the minimum Grunts should work at, but Gagaw felt like having an extra-long nap while his suit refilled.

He ambled over to the methane tank and entered the airlock. He placed his palm on the reader, and the door behind him swung shut. Gas

flooded into the chamber through vents in the floor. Gagaw heard a beep, and the gas stopped. He took off his atmosphere suit one piece at a time, and hooked his personal tank into a tube in the wall. then, the door in front of him opened, and he stepped into the main body of the tank.

It felt good to be out of his bulky suit. The swirling, slightly blue gas surrounding him reminded him of his home planet. The Covenant had destroyed the world once the Grunts had sworn allegiance, as insurance against their defection. Their plentiful methane tanks were all that was left. The Covenant _did_ take pity on the Grunts, and tinged the methane blue to simulate the atmosphere of their planet.

Gagaw took a deep breath of the life-giving methane, and looked around the tank. He was alone, save for one of his comrades from the work crew, who was sleeping in the corner. He walked over to the slightly smaller Grunt, and nudged him.

"Kakay, do you know of the green human?" Gagaw asked. Kakay grunted and rolled over. "Kakay!" Gagaw said, shaking him.

"What? Oh, Gagaw. Why did you have to wake me up? I was dreaming of the most wonderful place." Kakay said, still half asleep up.

Gagaw sat back on his haunches. "I don't care. I asked you a question."

"What do you want?"

Gagaw looked around to make sure they were alone. "Do you know of the green human?"

At that, Kakay sat straight up, instantly awake.

"What! Is he here! Has he come to kill us all!"

Gagaw put his hand on Kakay's shoulder. "Easy, Kakay. I just want to know about him."

Kakay relaxed, but only marginally. He was still shaking slightly as he began to talk.

"A long time ago, before the Covenant even knew about Reach, I was stationed on a destroyer in the Lambda Serpentis system. I landed on one of the planets, which was at the time a small human farming colony. Me and my squad were put on guard duty at a drop point on the edge of a cliff. We encountered weak human resistance, and beat them back with ease. At least, until the green one came.

He jumped up on top of a twenty human foot tall wall, and opened fire. Two rockets struck the nearest guard towers, but before the rockets had even hit, he had another launcher in his hands. The other two towers were destroyed before the wreckage of the first two hit the ground.

Me and the other grunts didn't know what to do, until the green one threw away his weapon and took out a thin, long one. He leapt back behind the wall, just as the Elites' plasma bolts impacted the spot where he had just stood. He moved so fast, we thought he had been hit

and killed.

The Elite commander was just telling us to get back to work when his head exploded.

The second-in-command screamed at us to take cover, but he was dead before he finished his sentence. The other two Elites quickly fell to the sniper fire, leaving us disoriented and terrified.

Suddenly, we heard a scrape of stone. We looked to the wall, and saw the green human again, unarmed and standing akimbo. Almost as if he was daring us to come closer.

We went into a frenzy. One hundred Grunts stampeded towards the wall, howling for blood. We wanted to make this human pay for what he had done.

We didn't get very far before we learned a valuable lesson about this human's ingenuity.

The ground below us heaved and blew into the sky. Fragments of metal flew through the air, ripping into our ranks and tearing us to pieces. Explosions cut the dusk air, and when the smoke cleared, all but a handful of us lay dead on the ground.

The green human, satisfied with his work, jumped off the wall and walked to the drop site. He knelt on the large 'X' that marked it, and set a number of large, flat devices on the ground. Then, as quickly and silently as he had come, he turned and sprinted away, as swift as the wind."

Gagaw blinked. This human was indeed a formidable foe.

"It wasn't until the next day that we heard of this same human killing a squad of Elites in Ghosts, and then destroying a pair of Hunters. A PAIR! He shoved a grenade down one's armor, and punctured the other one's spine with his bare hands. All this, without taking a single hit."

"I see." said Gagaw. "And you're sure he isn't a robot?"

"Of course. Even the Covenant haven't developed a robot _that_ good. The humans would never have technology like that."

"Well, he is no normal human, that's for sure."

"Some of us have begun to think that he is an immortal. Perhaps he is a harbinger of the gods, sent to punish us for something we have done."

"You're beginning to sound like one of the fanatical Elites."

"Am I?" Kakay said, shaking his head. "You haven't seen him jump on to a Banshee in flight, throw out the Elite pilot, and take the craft for himself."

Gagaw gaped at Kakay. "That's impossible! Banshees may be a bit slow for fighters, but they're aircraft! Even if he is a divine warrior, he can't fly!"

Kakay was silent.

"You don't mean to say- " Gagaw started.

"Perhaps he cannot fly, but he can jump on top of a guard tower so fast that it can't hit him."

Gagaw was becoming more and more uneasy. From what he had heard about this green-armored human, he could fly, dodge bullets, run as fast as a tank, and hit an Elite in the eye from 100 meters. Maybe he was an incarnation of the god of war, seeking retribution for some wrong the Covenant had committed.

Kakay stood up. "Thanks a lot. Now I won't be able to sleep for days." He walked to the airlock and put on his refilled atmosphere suit.

Gagaw followed him. "I sure hope he doesn't come here."

"there isn't a soul alive that doesn't agree with you there."

As Gagaw was getting his own suit on, he heard the shrill whistle of the perimeter alarm. Within seconds, the entire camp was on full alert, sirens blaring, soldiers running everywhere. One of the outer guard towers had spotted something.

Something green.

Gagaw popped a new clip into his Needler and ran to the nearest supply depot for some grenades. If he was going anywhere, the green-armored human would not catch _this_ Grunt unprepared.

Gagaw dodged the next wave of superheated plasma cascading from the guard towers, and turned behind the charred remains of a methane tank. At least the green-armored ones were unfamiliar with the Covenant aiming systems, or he would have been dead by now.

He unclipped a grenade from his belt and moved his finger to the arming button. He peered around the corner. A green-armored one was sneaking towards him, as as soon as Gagaw showed his head, the green one saw him. He started to run towards Gagaw, leveling his weapon.

Gagaw armed the grenade and threw it with all his strength. He watched it spiral towards the green one, and felt slightly relieved. _Let's see a godly warrior survive a grenade at pointblank range_, he thought to himself. But his relief once again turned to horror as he saw the green one slow.

The green one drew his pistol and put it in front of him. The grenade stuck to the pistol, and it threw it over its shoulder. The grenade exploded harmlessly behind him.

Gagaw didn't even think, he just ran.

After stocking himself up with enough explosives to level a city block, Gagaw reported to his Elite superior. He was slightly larger than the rest of the Elites, and had a prosthetic metal left arm. He wore the gold armor of a Field Commander.

Gagaw ran up to him, stopped, and saluted. "Squad Leader Gagaw, reporting for duty, sir." He hated having to be so subordinate, but he had no choice. He glanced at the Field Commander's large Carbine strapped to his back.

"At ease, Grunt. Get your squad together, and report to the Southeast sector of the base." The Elite looked over Gagaw's plentiful grenades. "And try not to blow anything up."

"Affirmative, sir. Do we know who tripped the perimeter alarm?"

The Field Commander looked wistfully at the mountains at the distance. "Do you know of the "Green Demon"?"

"The human in the armor?" Gagaw asked, his mouth going dry.

The Elite shot a hard look at Gagaw. "He is not human, that is for sure." He stared at his left arm, and flexed it menacingly. "And if I ever catch him, I will peel him apart piece by piece, and won't stop until I have his bones at my feet."

Gagaw gulped. This human was becoming a legend. If the Elites had already deemed him a "demon", he had done some serious damage.

Gagaw ran to the nearest methane tank, which most of his squad frequented. He dashed to a control panel next to the air lock, and spoke into a receiver in the wall.

"Attention, Gamma Squad B! Report outside immediately! We have enemy contacts on the perimeter!"

It was only a matter of moments before Tatak, Gagaw's second in command, and Kakay appeared in the airlock. Gagaw quickly explained the situation, and calmed them down after their panic about the green-armored human. He waited for his other comrades, and left the other two to chatter nervously.

When the rest of his squad was assembled, he led them to the Southeast sector. This side of the base was heavily defended, with a pair of guard towers and a complement of three Wraith tanks. The Field Commander stuck his head out of the third tank, and shouted at Gagaw.

"Squad leader! Get your squad out into the forest for recon, coordinates 84 by 237!"

Gagaw saluted. "I'm on it, sir!"

The Elite retreated into his tank and closed the hatch. He dove away after the other two tanks, who led the way around the edge of the forest.

Gagaw turned to his squad. "You heard him! Move out!" He turned and jogged towards the tree line. His squad followed, slower and much more hesitantly.

When they reached the trees, they slowed. No reason to do more work than they had to. They crept under low branches and through underbrush that a larger species would have trouble with. Grunts were especially suited for ambushes and recon work, where their keen sense

of smell and small size were an asset. Their intelligence was nothing to be proud of, though, so they were mainly cannon fodder.

Gagaw's squad snuck through the overgrown forest, every sense searching for any trace of humans. They looked for any sign that the "Green Demon" had passed by.

Tatak, who had point, stopped. He held up his hand, and motioned for silence. He pointed at the ground, and the squad looked down.

Footprints.

However, they were shallow, and heavily scuffed, as if the one making them had a serious limp. They continued farther into the forest, and had a thick trail of blood next to them.

Tatak looked up at gagaw and grinned. "This is our chance to seize glory, Gagaw! Think of the recognition we would get for bringing back the head of the green-armored human? We would show the Jackals, and even the Elites, to be incompetent! We could gain command of this whole operation! We could get our own battleships! Think of it, Gagaw!"

Gagaw scratched his head. "I don't know, Tatak. Remember, this human is devilishly smart. This could be a trick."

"But even he would not spill his own blood, just to throw off recon patrols! He is injured, and we can finish him off!" By this point, Tatak was jumping with glee at the prospect of his own starship.

Gagaw shook his head. "Fine. We'll follow the trail. But you take point. This was your idea, and I won't risk my hide for it."

The squad continued on, with Tatak once again in front. The footprints got more smudged as the Grunts followed them, and the blood trail widened.

The footprints eventually led them to a small clearing. The squad peered out of the bushes, and saw a very happy sight.

They saw the green human, sitting down, with blood covering his leg. He clutched at his knee, where the blood was pouring from in great amounts.

Tatak started breathing heavily as he parted the branches in front of him and began to enter the clearing. The rest of the squad, inspired by his boldness, stepped out also. Gagaw stayed behind. Satisfied that nothing was going to happen, Tatak began to run towards the green human. The rest of the squad followed him in this action also.

Tatak sprang at the human, and was immediately knocked sideways as his entire upper body exploded.

Kakay, who had been the last to step into the clearing, screamed. He turned to run, but was similarly blown to pieces by a high-velocity explosive bullet through his chest. The scene turned to Gagaw's idea of Hell when he saw what he had never even dreamed about.

Five more green-armored humans stepped out of the surrounding foliage, holding their deadly projectile guns. They aimed at the remaining Grunts and opened fire. Screams filled the air, along with hot lead as Gagaw's entire squad was killed.

Gagaw, who was still hidden in the trees, didn't dare move. He watched in horror as the wounded human stood up, perfectly fine, and threw away the animal heart leaking blood that he had been pressing onto his knee.

These _things_ were not human, they were monsters.

One of them looked ito the distance, roughly to the North. He held up his huge hand, and made the "thumbs up" sign that the humans used so much.

Gagaw heard a rustle in the leaves on the opposite side of the clearing. The sound was barely audible, but another green monster entered the open area, holding a gun roughly twice Gagaw's height in length. The "wounded" one turned to this newcomer.

They faced each other for a few seconds, as if conversing silently. After a pause, they all began searching the bodies of the Grunts.

Gagaw didn't wait to watch the green humans pick through the remains of his squad. He had to get out of there before they realized he was there.

Gagaw backed away, slowly and silently. He prayed to the Gods that the humans wouldn't notice. He started to back up faster.

He heard a snap.

He glanced down and saw the twig he had stepped on. He immediately looked to the humans.

They were already heading towards him. Damn their incredible hearing and reflexes. They crouched, and moved forward without a sound.

Gagaw turned and ran. He didn't care about stealth anymore. He just wanted to get away from the clearing alive.

As Gagaw ran through the remains of his camp, he saw the products of the humans' destruction. Bodies littered the ground. Blood covered the walls of the compound, the blue of the Elites, the purple of the Jackals, and the green of his fellow Grunts. He looked into the distance and saw a welcome sight.

A Covenant dropship was heading for the camp at its maximum speed. It slowed and landed as it reached the outskirts of the base, and Gagaw could see reinforcements jumping from the side hatches. The new forces gathered near the camp's gate and made their way through the wreckage. Gagaw waited for them at the gate.

He heard an Elite yell, and in a moment the gate was blown inward from an explosive. The Covenant forces entered the desolate camp.

Gagaw jumped up and down and waved his arms, signaling to his comrades. A team of Grunts (who were the first ones into the hostile territory, of course) saw him and let out a squeal of surprise. Gagaw ran to the Elite in charge and introduced himself.

"Sir! Squad Leader Gagaw reporting!" Gagaw said, saluting.

The Elite looked at him, puzzled. "What squad do you command, Grunt?" he said.

"Gamma Squad B, sir."

"You were stationed here, correct?" the Elite asked. Gagaw nodded.

The Elite looked over the ruins of the base. "Where is the rest of your garrison, Grunt?"

"Excuse me, sir, but you're looking at it."

The Elite's jaw dropped as he looked at Gagaw. "Very funny, Grunt. I need to speak with your Commanding Officer. If this is his camp, he's got a lot to answer for."

Gagaw looked the Elite in the eye. "You want to talk to my Commanding Officer?" he asked sarcastically. He walked over to the wreckage of a Wraith tank and picked up a piece of blood covered gold armor sticking out of the twisted metal. He tossed it to the Elite, who caught it. "There. Have a nice, long conversation with him. I doubt he'll have much to say, though."

The Elite looked at the armor plate in his hand.

"I know what he'd tell you anyway." Gagaw said. The Elite looked up at him. "Our perimeter alarms went off, so we went into the forest to search for the enemy. My squad found them, but obviously, the rest of us didn't get very far. It was the Green Demon, sir. And guess what? There's more of them. My squad was massacred by seven of them. We didn't even get to fire a shot." Gagaw took a look around the camp. "And by the looks of it, there are other ones running around somewhere."

The Elite looked around, fearfully now. He drew his Plasma Rifle, while the Grunts whimpered with dismay. Every soldier around Gagaw drew their weapon, and aimed it at the shadows of the dead camp.

Gagaw heard a small crack, and whipped out his needler as he spun around. He aimed it at the burned out Banshee shell that had made the sound. As he watched, a battered, bloody Elite climbed out of the cockpit. He was badly injured, and saw them as he leaned himself against his craft. He stood up in surprise, and started walking towards them.

"Praise the Gods! I thought I was gone for sure!" he said, as he limped faster towards Gagaw and the reinforcements.

Gagaw himself was amazed that he had survived the green ones' massacre. Maybe they weren't perfect, after all.

That thought was shattered the instant he looked over the wounded Elite. A small strip of green adhesive (which the humans called "OD" tape) poked up over his shoulder. As the wounded trooper painfully jogged towards his comrades, Gagaw groaned. He covered his head.

As soon as the wounded Elite reached his fellow soldiers, the land mine taped to his back exploded.

Gagaw was thrown backwards, into the former Elite's Banshee. As he struck it, the air was pushed from his lungs. He gasped, but kept his face covered. If his breathing mask was damaged, it wouldn't matter how clever or lucky he was.

When the blast subsided, Gagaw stood and surveyed the scene. A meter-deep crater was left where the wounded Elite had been, and everything in sight was scorched black. Gagaw had been shielded from the blast from the wrecked Wraith tank he had been standing on, but the rest weren't nearly as lucky.

Bodies lay everywhere. Some were burned beyond recognition, but most were simply gone, their bodies vaporized.

Gagaw heard a moan. He turned around and saw the Elite leader of the reinforcements. His legs were gone, replaced by a twisted mass of ash.

He pulled himself toward Gagaw. "Get to the Dropship." he whispered. "Big red autopilot button. Leads to - carrier in orbit." He fell silent and still.

Gagaw looked out of the destroyed door the others had blown open. The Dropship stood out on the field,powered up and ready to go. He stood, and ran towards it, with every intention of getting off this damned rock.

He stopped. The green humans were smart, and he didn't dare test their intelligence. He walked to the side of the gate, and climbed a ladder that led to the top of the camp's walls. Once at the top, he jumped down onto the remains of another tank. he leapt to the ground, and looked around. to his right, there was a Ghost hovercraft against the camp wall. It was undamaged, but relatively far away, across an open field. Gagaw didn't relish the thought of being pinned to the wall with bullets.

He looked around the tank, and found a solution. Perhaps a human had commandeered this tank, or maybe the driver had panicked. But whatever the reason, the body of a Jackal lay under the bulk of the tank, its arms stretched out towards the camp.

Gagaw knelt by the corpse, and took its energy shield off of its forearm. _He won't need it anymore._ Gagaw thought to himself.

He flicked on the shield, and watched it extend its bright blue energy field. Definitely enough to protect him for a short sprint. He braced himself, and took off.

Once again, his legs worked the hardest they ever had. He raced for the Ghost, his mind only on escape. As he got closer, he saw that the hovercraft's outer armor was pockmarked with bullet holes and dents.

Not perfect, but good enough.

He made it behind his escape vehicle. He switched the shield off, not
wanting to attract any undue attention. He activated the hovercraft's
engine and lift systems without getting in, and once it was off the
ground, he leapt on and gunned the engine. He sped off, easily
exceeding 100 human "MPH". The Dropship, and safe passage for Gagaw,
got closer and closer.

Suddenly, a fireball slammed into the front of Gagaw's vehicle,
flipping it upside down. Gagaw screamed, and flew out of the burning
wreck, thrown forward by his immense inertia. He flipped over and
over, to smash into the ground knees first. He felt his foot snap,
and was paralyzed in pain.

Gagaw reached into one of his belt pockets and withdrew a small
canister of painkiller. He clipped it onto his breathing mask, and
immediately felt cool relief flood through his body. He stood again,
and tiredly jogged towards the Dropship, dragging his useless foot.
He was close now, so close. Maybe he would finally get out of this
mess.

He reached the boarding ramp, and walked in. He pulled himself into
the pilot's seat, and strapped himself in. He turned on the engines,
and heard their reassuring hum as they charged. He found the large
red autopilot button, and waited for the engines to reach capacity.
He heard the high-pitched tone signaling engine initiation. He hit
the button.

Nothing happened.

He hit it again. Nothing. He punched it, his anger growing. He would
not give up. He continued to beat at the button, until it jammed and
he could press it no more.

He unstrapped himself, and walked back towards the boarding ramp. He
was stuck here. He peered cautiously out of the hatch. He stepped
out, confident that imminent, excruciating death wasn't waiting for
him. He looked to his Ghost, and saw that it was completely
destroyed.

Gagaw walked to the other compartment of the U-shaped Dropship. He
looked in, and jumped for joy when he saw what was inside.

A perfectly clean, unused Ghost. Its glossy finish shone in Eridanus'
setting light. He walked around it, and found it ready to go,
batteries charged and plasma reserves full. He checked its side
compartments, and found four Plasma grenades, a pile of small methane
cartridges, and a Carbine (with plentiful ammunition). Fully loaded,
to be sure.

He hopped into the driver's seat and turned it on. Its engines
purred, and it lifted off the ground silently. He gently pressed the
throttle forward. It responded without a hitch, gliding out of the
Dropship. Gagaw pushed the throttle to full power, and the Ghost
jumped forward, engines humming powerfully.

Gagaw sped across the field towards his base, new hope lighting his
face. Perhaps he could survive here, as long as he had enough
ammunition and methane. He smiled beneath his breathing mask, finally

happy. As he raced towards his soon-to-be stronghold, the Gods were smiling upon Gagaw.

And as the high-density sniper rifle round tore through his head, they took it all away again.

SPARTAN-104, otherwise known as Fred, took the binoculars from his eyes and turned to his right. His comrade, Joshua (designation SPARTAN-029), leaned back from his sniper rifle.

"Nice Shooting, Red Six." Fred said.

Joshua turned to him, and put two fingers to his visor in the shape of a smile. It passed for theirs', since their visors obscured their faces. "Like shooting a frog in a barrel, sir."

Fred chuckled softly. "Like hell it was. 600 meters, and you got him through the ears."

"Thanks, Chief."

Fred turned back to his binoculars, studying the surrounding landscape. Killing one Grunt was a drop in the bucket, but it was something. And it was a spectacular shot. Someone else might have called it luck, but Fred knew better.

After all, Spartans didn't need luck, they just made others' run out.

End
file.